

## Leading Change: Military Leadership in Civilian Organizations

by

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# USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

## LEADING CHANGE: MILITARY LEADERSHIP IN CIVILIAN ORGANIZATIONS

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## **ABSTRACT**

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Military leaders are often assigned to largely civilian organizations, for the first time, late in their careers. Once there, they may see a need for change or are directed to make change in these organizations. They assume that they can apply all the same lessons they have learned about operating in or effectively leading organizations of purely military service members. Unless the military leader understands the civilian workforce subculture this transition can be especially difficult for both the organization and the military leader. This paper will explore the differences in leadership techniques that are needed in order to contribute to the continued success of these civilian organizations and avoid pitfalls that could lead to a very frustrating stalemate for both the military leader and the organization they join.





## LEADING CHANGE: MILITARY LEADERSHIP IN CIVILIAN ORGANIZATIONS

There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things.

—Nicolo Machiavelli <sup>1</sup>

Military leaders often join civilian organizations late in their careers. Normally, these same leaders have not previously served with civilians or in leadership roles in civilian organizations. Military leaders assume that they can apply all the same organizational leadership lessons that they have learned throughout their careers. While leadership is leadership and all of the same principles apply, the civilian organization presents some unique challenges. Without a full appreciation and understanding of their new environment, the military leader may never overcome these challenges.

Military leadership in civilian organizations requires an understanding of the Army subculture that is the civilian workforce. “While prior success leading others in uniform lays a strong foundation, civilians are different. And to maximize their contributions to mission success, they must be led and managed differently.”<sup>2</sup> General James H. Pillsbury, former commander of the Defense Distribution Center said, “The civilian culture is not vastly different from the military, yet it is distinctly its own!”<sup>3</sup> The culture is neither better nor worse - it is just different. Dr. Craig Kuriger, Adjunct Professor at Black Hawk College and retired Department of the Army Civilian adds, “For the military leader, managing a civilian workforce is different from leading military subordinates.”<sup>4</sup> Military members must appreciate the differences in order to contribute to the continued success of the organization and avoid some pitfalls that could lead to a very frustrating stalemate for both the military leader and the organization they join. Military leaders who expect and/or demand the same environment that they have grown up in will have a

particularly challenging experience both as the organizational leader and for the civilians within the organization.

Civilian employees are great Americans, dedicated, hard working, especially skilled and experienced. We have all heard the old adage, “Little old ladies in tennis shoes” run the Army. This simply means that many do not understand the critical part civilians play in the operation of our Army. General Pillsbury, while serving as commander of the Defense Distribution Center said, “I did not appreciate them because I did not understand the critical role they play of their unyielding dedication to the mission.”<sup>5</sup> He went on sum up civilian employees by saying they have “tremendous technical knowledge and *are* dedicated.”<sup>6</sup> They are as committed to mission accomplishment as military members. Karin Gan, the Lead Publications’ Editor at the US Army Engineer School and sixteen year veteran of civil service said, “Like their uniformed counterparts, Army civilians are committed to selfless service in the performance of their duties.”<sup>7</sup> Civilian employees’ desires are similar to the desires of the military members; they want the “best possible organization.”<sup>8</sup> One of the greatest strengths of the civilian workforce is “that they are stable, remaining in their jobs for much longer periods of time than the military. They learn their jobs and hone the skills necessary to be at the highest level of skill and knowledge in their fields.”<sup>9</sup> Most civil servants are indeed “knowledge workers.”<sup>10</sup> This expertise; however, can become “a drawback when it comes to change and change management.”<sup>11</sup> Civilian personnel are not normally as adept at change as the military member. Permanent Change of Station (PCS) moves and frequent rebuilding of organizational teams “make military personnel more adaptable to change than their civilian counterparts.”<sup>12</sup> This does not make the

civilian employee less committed or dedicated, it just makes them more comfortable with stability. “Most civilians are motivated to do what they perceive as a good job...*however*, stability is *often* more important than *career* mobility.”<sup>13</sup>

Military leaders who join civilian organizations may see a need for change, or may be given a charter for change from their higher headquarters. Regardless of the reasons, the military leader will have to understand their new environment and understand that old approaches may not lend themselves to shifting the direction of their new organization. The new leader may think their organization should work more like an “Army” organization, or at least more like the Army organizations the leader grew up in. There is value in common staff and support structures and processes. Simply directing change to be so, may not produce any results. “When President Eisenhower was elected president after serving as Commander in the European Theater, his predecessor President Truman predicted that Eisenhower would sit behind that big desk and say ‘do this’ and ‘do that.’ And do you know what will happen? Nothing.”<sup>14</sup> Forcing change will not do the leader or the organization any good. It will lead to stalemate, frustration, and continued inefficiency. The good news is that it does not have to be this way.

Personal experience was the catalyst for this topic. The information provided is a result of lessons learned. Change was very much needed, but not necessarily in the manner it was communicated or executed. The consensus for the change was overwhelming; however, everything did not go well. Everything attempted did not work. The framework laid out in this paper is a result of actions taken, not taken, successes, and mistakes made.

## Overview and Four Parts

There are four parts for a military leader to consider in order to successfully lead change in a civilian organization. First, decide whether you want a compliant or committed organization. Second, understand and appreciate the environment of the civil service subculture. Third, identify the desired future for the organization. This is broader than a simple organizational vision. Once the desired future is determined, the leader must plot a course to get the organization on the right path. Finally, the leader must lead and manage change in their organization while keeping an open mind and staying flexible.

Before beginning the journey of leading organizational change the leader must ask themselves a critical question: "What is it that you seek from the organization or what is it that you desire for the organization? This initial viewpoint can be categorized by two words - Do you seek "compliance or commitment?" There is value and success in both approaches.

Compliance with orders and direction simply gets things done. An organization and organizational leaders can have great success, albeit temporary, by demanding compliance. Simply demanding and enforcing that organizational members do what they are directed to do will lead to mission accomplishment. This is not an all or nothing proposition. A certain amount of compliance is almost always necessary as some organizational members will not be able to see or embrace a new organizational vision. Some members may choose to commit their time and effort in attempts to deliberately dismantle or attack changes that are being made. In these cases, keeping the members on task and limit their ability to be a distraction to other organizational change efforts is critical. However, compliance is a slippery slope, especially for the long-term health and

success of the organization. Demanding compliance often limits initiative and usually leaves the organization in a worse position following the departure of the military leader.

For the military leader who chooses commitment, the road is long and hard but the potential future benefits to the organization are incalculable. Commitment is the “brass ring” of organizational culture. Members who are committed to each other and to the organizational mission/vision will create an environment with unlimited potential for success.

Next, conduct an assessment. Military leaders are accustomed to conducting an initial assessment. Understanding this new environment will require more than just looking at the usual indicators of organizational performance. This new work environment will probably be unlike any that the leader has been exposed to in their career. Civil servants are a subculture. Calling the civil servants a subculture is not pejorative. Military personnel are a subculture of the Department of Defense, and each service has their own slightly different subculture as well. The military leader must take time to gain a full understanding of the civil service subculture.

The leader must then plot a course to the desired organizational future and the organizational culture that must be achieved to support the desired future. Louis V. Gerstner, Jr. author of *Who Says Elephants Can't Dance* made this comment regarding culture as he assessed what needed to change at IBM in the mid 1990s, “I came to see, in my time at IBM, that culture isn't just one aspect of the game -- it is the game.”<sup>15</sup> Changing the organizational culture is the key to long term organizational success. Military leaders must be careful not to mistake civil service culture of stability and

comfort with skills and expertise, as a cultural problem. Desire for stability can be seen as resistance to change.

Finally, the leader must lead and manage the change. If not, work will overtake you and the immediate will consume the important. Days, weeks, and quarters can disappear and if the military leader does not put together regular milestones and potential short term gains, it just will not happen. The plan must be monitored, adjusted, executed, and continuously evaluated. Don't be afraid to change course on something that does not work. Do not be afraid to admit that something is not working.

It seems simple, decide if you desire "compliance or commitment," make an assessment, understand the environment, make a plan, execute it, and monitor it. It seems like any other military operation, and to a great extent it is. However, understanding the environment, and applying that environment to the "lead and manage change" step are where the most problems, roadblocks, derailments, disappointments, and frustrations can occur.

### Understanding the Environment

When trying to lead and manage change in civilian organizations there are several phrases that aid in understanding of the environment: 1) It is a marathon, do not sprint; 2) Change is a bad word; 3) Understand who has their own kingdom; 4) Civil servants are not generally developed up to be leaders; 5) Relationships often supersede staff functions, processes, and procedures; 6) Organizations are all unique; 7) Beware of "We've always done it that way."

It's a marathon, do not sprint. Military leaders and members are conditioned to join new organizations. They quickly form new teams and units and quickly begin sprinting. When a military leader joins a civilian organization this is one of the worst

things that they could try to do. The members of the organization the military leader is joining are marathoners. They have probably been a part of this organization for many years and have been doing the same thing in similar ways for their entire time there. A military leader who tries to sprint will find themselves alone and their efforts to lead change will almost certainly fail. General Carter Ham, the AFRICOM commander has highlighted an African proverb in his theater guidance, “If you go quickly, you go alone, if you go slowly we go together.” As a result of sprinting, the leader may encounter folks who will just wish to wait them out. The “wait you out” phenomenon is very real. Often quite deliberate and discussed and agreed to by organizational members. The military leader may find themselves trying to keep everything going. All the change that they desire for the perceived and real good of the organization, will be championed, carried, and measured by one person; the military leader.

Change is a bad word. “Walt Disney is credited with saying that “change is inevitable, growth is optional.”<sup>16</sup> Change is often the most difficult thing that anyone will go through in their lives. For change to be successful, the first step is to admit the problem or need. “After the admission phase has been passed, we start to get others to recognize that a change is needed.”<sup>17</sup> Some embrace change; however, for people who are uncomfortable with change, they will avoid it at all costs. Some people will grab hold of what they believe they can control and resist change with every fiber of their being, regardless of the potential benefits, especially if those benefits are more organizational than individual.

First, try to avoid using the word “change.” “Words frame *your change* philosophy: some plan and lead change, others manage it, still others accommodate

change, and many simply try to cope with it.”<sup>18</sup> Naming change is framing change. There are several words that are far less likely to stir a negative emotional response; growth, progress, evolution, posturing for the future, are all far less emotional words and concepts. Second, “Shift focus from change, to the people facing the change...managing change draws on our knowledge of human motivation, groups and leadership.”<sup>19</sup> The changed environment must be able to be tested by the people who are experiencing the change. “Foster and create an atmosphere that enables people to test the new change, make recommendations, experiment with new ways of operating, and exhibit some dysfunctional behavior while the change is taking root in the culture.”<sup>20</sup> Sometimes the needed change is fairly obvious. What is far less obvious is “...understanding the attitude and motivational demands for bringing it about.”<sup>21</sup>

Understand who has their own kingdom. This dynamic is normally not apparent as a new military leader becomes oriented to their new organization. But, there are kingdoms in the new organization. There are two distinct types of kingdoms. There are kingdoms that may need to be understood, worked with, and appreciated because they provide some valuable formal or informal leader influence that can be leveraged for the organization’s success. There are also kingdoms that need to be dismantled, because they are a cancer to the effectiveness and efficiency of the organization and/or have toxic leadership. Powerful personalities will have taken root in the organization and often established a ‘kingdom’ that they seek to protect at all costs.

Civil servants are not generally developed to be leaders. The Army Training and Leadership Development Panel 2003...revealed “that Army Civilians were not being adequately trained for leadership roles. The Army grows and develops the best Soldiers



in the world – and trains them to be leaders. However, growing Army civilian leaders has fallen short of that requirement.”<sup>22</sup> This has changed some since 2003; however, it remains the most critical difference between the development of a civil servant and a military member is the career focus or lack of focus on leadership development. Military members are grown, developed and schooled to be leaders. Civil servants are not. There are civil servant training and development programs; however, they are not used to their maximum benefit, nor are they necessarily focused on the right groups. Military leaders begin and continue that development throughout their careers. Privates become team leaders, squad leaders, platoon sergeants, first sergeant and sergeants major. Lieutenants become platoon leaders, section leaders, and company, battalion and brigade commanders. The civil service equivalent is similar to taking a Major or other Field Grade officer and introducing them to leadership for the first time. To a military member that seems absurd, however, there is very little or no training and development opportunities for more junior civil servants. “There are many programs to train and educate the civilian workforce, but they remain uncoordinated.”<sup>23</sup> “Schooling within the civilian workforce is more informal and depends on superiors and organizations to send the employee to school.”<sup>24</sup>

The organizational leader must ensure that civilian employees are sent to training. Invest in them. “One of the fastest ways to build people up is to train them. People receiving training perceive that the organization believes in them.”<sup>25</sup> If there is no money, train them yourself. “Goal setting, conflict management, simple team building... the training itself, *in many ways*, is less important than the interaction that occurred.”<sup>26</sup> Better trained civilians lead to better long term performance. “The more we...train and

develop our talented Army civilians, the more responsibility and autonomy they will acquire.”<sup>27</sup> This lack of leadership training is not unique to civil service. After joining IBM in the 1990s, Louis Gerstner discovered, “I had an enormous team of executives. I would need to develop a cadre of leaders.”<sup>28</sup> The same is often true in government civilian organizations.

Relationships often supersede staff functions, processes, and procedures. This is both good and bad. When the relationships are good; things will get done. When the relationships are not good, things will come to a screeching halt, and the military leader may never know that things are not working as they should work. “In some cases, interactions *will* become hostile when *it is* perceived *that* informal authorities are challenged.”<sup>29</sup> Relationships may cause employees to help or hinder each other in a task regardless of their organizational positions or responsibilities. The work may be “very ‘stove-piped’ and not clearly integrated amongst staff sections.”<sup>30</sup> The military leader must be watchful, and create an environment where coordination and facilitation are encouraged, while keeping processes, procedures and functions in the correct bins so that things happen without having to be closely monitored.

Organizations are all unique. All of the ideas about understanding the civil service organizational environment and culture are useful guidelines. However, there is some uniqueness that is found in each and every organization. Leaders must understand that regardless of what is written in books and publications there are likely to be some uniqueness in their organization - the combination of which really could not have been predicted. Maybe the organization has gone through Reduction-in-Force (RIF) so the remaining folks are the survivors bent on power consolidation in order to

survive the next potential RIF. Maybe the organization sees very little turn over, so new ideas and fresh perspective are judged to be detrimental to the continued success of the organization.

We have always done it this way and we have been doing well so far. Obviously, civil servant organizations are not a for-profit business so the need to maintain a competitive edge, to keep customers, and keep them happy is not a consideration. There is no survival instinct that takes over and helps to move an organization forward. The organizational employees normally see little value in changing anything that “has been working up until now.” Previous success or lack of significant failure will provide obstacles to change as the organizational members will not see the personal or organizational value. “The leader has for enemies all those who have done well under the old conditions and only lukewarm defenders in those who may do well with the change.”<sup>31</sup> If there is no direct or at least cursory value to them they are less inclined to participate and support the change. This past success or lack of failure also breeds a notion that “we do it best, or we know how to do it best.” Louis Gerstner, author of *Who Says Elephants Can't Dance*, identifies an institutional characteristic he calls “hermetically sealed quality – an institutional viewpoint that anything important started inside the company.”<sup>32</sup>

The “we have always done it this way” mantra was and is a least favorite phrase of any military leader. When joining a new organization a military leader believes they bring a fresh perspective and techniques from a dozen or so organizations. The organization the military leader joins views the value of the leader's experience very differently. The organization sees much value in success in the “way things have always

been done.” The organizational members believe “we have been in organization X for 20 years - what does the new and transient military leader know?” The new military leader of the organization believes, “I have been in a dozen different organizations in the last 20 years and have seen a lot, a lot that works and does not work, and have had other widely varied organizational experiences, what do the people from this new organization know about organizations?” The truth lies somewhere in the middle. Both parties have value in contributing to the future success of the organization. The real truth is that they cannot do it without each other. We need each other’s perspectives and experiences for a sustained successful future. “Do not try to force...your way of doing things...take some time to realize why over years and years things are done ‘the way it has always been done’.”<sup>33</sup> “There is likely a very good reason why the civilian is doing things the way he or she always has....after you develop a relationship, you will find it easier to challenge assumptions and try new approaches.”<sup>34</sup>

### Plotting a Course

Make a plan. Plot a course for the organization into the future. This course should consider many organizational functions and dynamics, some more obvious than others: recognition programs; counseling and evaluations; personal and professional development; work environments; organizational mission; teams and team building; safety; and communication. Assess these areas now (understanding the environment) and what should they look like in the future (plotting the course). The military leader should ask themselves, “Did you create a future or merely contend with the present?”<sup>35</sup> The plan need not be perfect. It will most certainly change, and some things may not work out at all. General Gordon Sullivan said of organizational transformation,

The challenge for the leader is not to get 'it' exactly right, because there is no 'it.' The challenge is to become good enough to seize and exploit developing opportunities...good enough to get it about right in execution.<sup>36</sup>

The next step in leading and managing change is to develop a vision statement that significantly captures what is desired in the future. "Vision is not some mystical, mysterious insight...*the leader's job...is to see what the organization can be beyond what it is today...envision a future for the organization and then inspire colleagues to join in building that future.*"<sup>37</sup> Does the vision capture the overarching themes of efficiency, care for people, care for the organization and its mission, performance, customer service, etc? "You have to know where you are going; to be able to state it clearly and concisely; and you have to care about it passionately. That all adds up to vision."<sup>38</sup>

As critical as the development of a vision is the communication of that vision. This task is critical and one that needs to occur continuously as the changes are being implemented. Briefings, emails, face to face, small groups, one-on-one are all techniques that must be used to communicate the new vision. Critical to the communication is the buy-in and subordinate communication efforts of the key organizational leaders. Jack Welch, CEO of General Electric, said the "communication must be relentless. A clear message communicated frequently."<sup>39</sup> The best leaders will "interact with individuals and groups in the organization to explain; who, what, when, where, why and the how."<sup>40</sup>

### Lead and Manage Change

There is much written about leading and managing change. Former Chief of Staff of the Army General Gordon Sullivan said, "Leaders *must* understand that the future is

created by positive action – not by slogans, not by fad surfing, not by more perfect planning, but by action.”<sup>41</sup> Leading and managing change takes action and commitment.

There are many lessons learned and practical tips for leading and managing change in a civilian organization. There are many questions to answer and points to consider as the military leader approaches the “lead and manage change” step:

- How does the organization become a committed organization?
- How does one measure commitment or success in the “squishy” areas of change?
- How does a military leader overcome the organization’s lack of leadership development?
- How does one build trust and empower employees?
- What motivates people?
- How deeply should the military leader become involved in the inner workings of the organization?
- What role does team building play when the military leader is the only new member of the organization?
- What are some useful short-term goals?
- What role does personality play?

Looking at the latter, personality plays a powerful role in persuading others, striving for commitment, allowing mistakes as the change takes hold, remaining steadfast when the things are not going well, empowering and trusting. Maybe the single most important component of personality is how the military leader treats people. Civilian organizations have seen many military leaders come and go. A person with a

charismatic personality is great; however, if they do not treat people well the organizational members will see through the charade very quickly. For employees that are isolated from the command group, the power of the military leader's personality and their demonstrated care for the employees may be the only positive leader reinforcement that they receive.

In an 1842 speech, President Lincoln "enunciated his philosophy regarding persuasion. 'When the conduct of men is designed to be influenced; kind, unassuming persuasion, should ever be adopted. It is an old and true maxim, that a drop of honey catches more flies than a gallon of gall. So with men. If you would win a man to your cause, convince him that you are his sincere friend.'"<sup>42</sup> Does this mean the military leader will have to go "soft;" that they will need to become a kinder gentler leader? Senior leaders, both civilian and military "have experienced a wide range of leadership styles and understand the nuanced distinction between the demand for high performance associated with a 'hard driving leader' and behaviors that are destructive to trust, cohesiveness and morale."<sup>43</sup> General Sullivan identifies the kind of leadership needed for a change, "This kind of leadership is not passive or accommodating. It is a roll-up-your-sleeves kind of leadership, short on buzzwords and wishful thinking, in which *change* starts at the top with a deep and uncompromising commitment to the values and purpose of the organization."<sup>44</sup>

Striving for an uncompromisingly committed organization is the long hard road, but it is well worth the work and effort. How does an organization become committed? What does that mean? "When you believe in people, care about them, trust them, they know it. And that respect inspires them to want to follow where you lead."<sup>45</sup> A committed

organization has autonomy, demonstrates initiative, is creative at developing solutions, they care about each other, and they care about the organization's mission. They are selfless. A leader's demonstrated care and example for the workforce has a direct impact on the level of commitment of the organization.

For anyone to get behind an organizational change it must be "their" change. "People feel powerless when they experience no control over their work and all power seems outside of their control. They feel disconnected from the organization's success or failure. They see themselves as victims."<sup>46</sup> When this occurs and there is no ownership of change in the organization, workers will most likely just 'dig in' and wait the military leader out. "People rise to the challenge when it is **their** challenge."<sup>47</sup> Organizational members must believe that they have the power to make things better, to make organizational changes. A common message "is that only people with the power to bring about change are those at the top of the hierarchy, not those further down. This represents a profound and tragic confusion."<sup>48</sup> "When people lack ownership of an idea, they usually resist it, even when it is in their best interest."<sup>49</sup> Change that is owned at the lowest levels has the best chance of success.

In order for change to gain momentum, the leader must establish achievable short-term goals. They can be quite simple. Vince Lombardi, legendary Green Bay Packers football coach said, "The goal of winning a championship had to be built of a foundation of a thousand small victories...it depended on motivation and inspiration by degree: people being encouraged by each small victory to move on to the next challenge."<sup>50</sup> Once accomplished the short term goals should be celebrated to help



others get behind the change. The leader should consider recognizing the individuals who helped make the change.

In contrast to this gaining momentum for change, change does not necessarily move more quickly once you see some success and do more of the same. “In the early stages when you can see improvement, you want to do more of the same—after all it’s working so well.”<sup>51</sup> When things are not going so well, “you want to compensate by striving even harder. Unfortunately, the more vigorously you push the familiar levers, the more strongly the balancing process resists, and the more futile your efforts become.”<sup>52</sup> Change is not necessarily always a product of what should obviously work; sometimes obstacles need to be identified and removed. Peter M. Senge, author of *The Fifth Discipline*, calls this the “factors limiting growth.”<sup>53</sup> He goes on to say, “To change the behavior of the system, you must identify and change the limiting factor. This may require actions you may not yet have considered, choices you never noticed, or difficult changes in rewards and norms.”<sup>54</sup> Many “well intentioned efforts for improvement” run into “limits to growth.”<sup>55</sup> The solutions may not seem obvious or even intuitive, so remain adaptive and open minded.

Empowering and trusting the organizational employees is the best way to achieve long term success for change. It provides the perfect environment for change to take root. General Pillsbury said, “Civilian personnel...are best served...when they are provided with the resources and direction that enable and empower them to work toward accomplishing their organization’s mission and attaining its visions.”<sup>56</sup> The military leader must take the first steps towards demonstrating trust for the civilian employee. “People become strong and effective only when they are given the

opportunity to make decisions, initiate action, solve problems, and meet challenges.”<sup>57</sup>

Give the civilian employee authority and resources, and hold them accountable to produce results.<sup>58</sup> Share “control, responsibility, and ownership of the organizational processes”, and empowered employees will follow.<sup>59</sup> There will be failure on the empowerment journey. How the military leader reacts, as long as the failure is not due to negligence, will determine how truly “empowered” the employees feel.

In order to build trust with the civilian workforce, leaders must be passionate about the change and must be the example of committed change for the organization. Saint Francis of Assisi said, “Preach the Gospel at all times – and if necessary use words.”<sup>60</sup> This is not an attempt to spiritualize the handling of this topic, but the underlying meaning of what is said is profound. The leadership example, the example of caring, respect, mentoring and patience will send the loudest message. It will greatly enhance your ability to build trust in your organization. “Trust requires evidence from the leaders. Evidence that leaders will act fairly, will help others to achieve their goals, and will act on moral and ethical principles.”<sup>61</sup>

In order to further build that trust, the military leader must be present in the workspaces and cubicles; the military leader must actively engage the workforce. During his presidency, Abraham Lincoln “spent most of his time among the ‘troops.’ They were number one to him; they were the people who were going to get the job done.”<sup>62</sup> Put it on the schedule, block time, and get out and just talk to people. There are several approaches; like walking around, breakfast with the boss, brown bag lunches with supervisors and workers, first line supervisor round tables, all of these activities create a “culture of engagement.”<sup>63</sup> Genuinely engaged workers, will more quickly

develop a trust with their leader. In fact, for some employees just being engaged will motivate them.

For other employees, finding out what motivates them will be more complicated. “What are the levers of motivation...what can be done to change the attitudes, behaviors, and thinking of a populations.”<sup>64</sup> There are many. The military leader must figure out what works by individual. There are no cookie cutter solutions. The military leader may have to try several things before they find out what works. Some are motivated by recognition, some by money, some by time off, some by advancement, and some by fear. In order to get the behavior that the leader seeks, figure out what works for each individual and start pulling the levers. “You get more of the behavior you reward. You don’t get what you hope for, ask for, wish for, or beg for. You get what you reward.”<sup>65</sup> Take time to recognize personnel, make sure that performance and service awards are publicly recognized. A technique is to generate certificates for all awards and recognitions including time off, cash, and promotions.

Teambuilding plays an enormous role in moving an organization forward. It also expedites the new leader’s acceptance in the organization and provides another forum for understanding the environment and communicating the vision. Organize the team building to work across the organizational stovepipes or “cylinders of excellence.” For example, if it is a garrison organization; include a few personnel from Public Works, a few from training, a few from safety, and so on. This will promote relationships among personnel who may not even know that the others work in the organization. This also provides a launching point for greater coordination and cooperation across the organization.

While the new military leader will have their hands full leading and managing change, there are a few areas where it is well worth the effort to “get down in the weeds.” Some personnel actions, like promotions or awards, may need the leader’s attention in order to ensure that past relationships or biases do not impact proper action. Some tasks may require hand holding in order to get accomplished. Either because the task is not well understood, it is not something that has been routinely accomplished in the organization previously, or it is being resisted. Finally, accountability and counseling will need the military leader’s focus. Ensure that employees receive thoughtful, timely and proper counseling. Ensure individuals are counseled for and otherwise held accountable for failing to complete tasks, or for improper or toxic behavior. Fair and consistent application of accountability standards will be largely appreciated by employees who sometimes perceive that others do not pull their weight in the organization. It will ensure that every employee makes a necessary contribution of the accomplishment of the organization’s mission. These areas are not the “fix and move on” kind of areas, to be effective they will need routine monitoring and involvement.

Everything that is tried will not produce results. Likewise they may not produce immediate results. Evaluate everything associated with the desired end state on a routine basis. Everything cannot be measured. Much of the ongoing assessment will be conducted through the military leader’s engagement with the organizational employees. Develop consistent questions to use during employee engagements. Focus questions on behavior, attitudes, and seek additional recommendations from the workforce on both problem areas and the solutions. Be prepared to modify the plan, be adaptive. Finally, the military leader must manage their expectations. “Civilians do not have the

same level of *leadership or staff training as their military counterpart*. When expectations *are beyond their training...they may not respond.*"<sup>66</sup>

Don't take it personally. There will be resistance to change. The employees may feel their stability will be threatened. The employees may also feel as if their experiences and skills are being questioned. It becomes very easy to take the resistance to change personally, especially when employees make their resistance or disagreement public. Organizational change is about the organization. Someone will always dislike the military leader's ideas or approach. The approach could include promotions and pay raises for everyone and there will still be unhappy or disagreeable employees.

A final thought in leading and managing change. Change that is focused on a committed organization will take a long time. There are many attitudes, behaviors, and organizational practices to overcome. The military leader is unlikely to see the fruits of the organizational change during their tenure. Understand this and transition the vision for the organization to the new military leader in order to grow the seeds of change that have been planted.

### Conclusion

Leading change in a civilian organization is a significant challenge. It can be much more complicated when the military and civilian sub-cultures collide. In this circumstance military leadership of change in civilian organizations is fraught with challenges, potential pitfalls, frustration, and huge potential for success. Civilian employees are some of the most committed, dedicated, and talented experts that a military leader may have the honor to serve with in their career. The key factors in successful change are a pursuit of commitment, a solid understanding of the

environment, a well plotted course and communicated vision, and a leader who is committed to leading and managing in a manner that is conducive to change. There are many factors that are not normally thought of when military leaders lead military organizations. Understanding these factors are critical to success. The risks and challenges are well worth the reward for the organizational members, the military leader and for the future of the organization.

## Endnotes

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<sup>4</sup> Craig C. Kuriger, "Civilian Teams and Army Hierarchy" *Army Sustainment* (Nov/Dec 2003) pg. 41

<sup>5</sup> James H. Pillsbury, "The Value of Civilians," *Army Sustainment* (Jul/Aug 2003) pg. 22

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<sup>7</sup> Karin Gan, "Army Civilian Corps" *Engineer* (January-March 2007) pg. 42

<sup>8</sup> James H. Pillsbury, "The Value of Civilians," *Army Sustainment* (Jul/Aug 2003) pg. 22

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>15</sup> Louis V. Gerstner Jr., *Who Says Elephants Can't Dance?: Leading a Great Enterprise through Dramatic Change*, (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2002). pg. 182

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<sup>17</sup> John W. Moran and Baird K. Brightman, "Leading Organizational Change" *Career Development International* 6 (2001). pg. 113

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- <sup>22</sup> Karin Gan, "Army Civilian Corps" *Engineer* (January-March 2007) pg. 42
- <sup>23</sup> Volney Jim Warner and Natalie Lui Duncan, "Army Civilians – Professionals by Any Definition," *Military Review* (September 2011): pg 65
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- <sup>26</sup> Michael Dane Accord, "Leading Civilian Employees: Seven Steps for Military Members Supervising Civilians for the First Time" *Infantry* (Sep/Oct 2011) pg. 6
- <sup>27</sup> Volney Jim Warner and Natalie Lui Duncan, "Army Civilians – Professionals by Any Definition," *Military Review* (September 2011): pg 65
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- <sup>30</sup> Ibid.
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- <sup>32</sup> Louis V. Gerstner Jr., *Who Says Elephants Can't Dance?: Leading a Great Enterprise through Dramatic Change*, (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2002). pg. 189
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